

Istikh'arah & Fa'al: Occult Muslim Traditions

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This article is dedicated to Al Aleem ul Jayyed, Al Shaikh al Fazil Akbar Ali Ezzy. He was the former principal of Al Jameatus Saifyah – Karachi. This humble student achieved Ma'arif from him. He was a specialist of occult sciences and an erudite scholar. May Allah shower His choicest blessings upon his soul, A'ameen

Tradition of Istikh'arah:

From the early era of Islam, various branches of occult sciences have been popular and are practiced by Muslims seeking divine guidance, in matters in which they face difficulties or confusion. Besides Uloom Zahirah (exoteric sciences), there are Uloom Khafiyyah (occult sciences). Teaching of the exoteric sciences are given in academic institutions worldwide, while occult sciences are not taught in institutions, but transferred from the master to his selected pupils. These sciences deal with hidden forces within the cosmos. To protect humanity from the misuse of supernatural powers, traditional learning of Uloom Khafiyyah is not promoted and permitted and is not open for all. The occult sciences – Uloom Khafiyyah, include sciences such as Istikh'arah and Fa'al which are in practice amongst the Muslims worldwide. Abi Abdillah al Imam Jafar al Sadiq (AS) taught numerous sciences to his students which included 'ilm al Istikh'arah and 'ilm al Fa'al. He taught 'ilm al Fa'al - the "science of omens" - and Istikh'arah – the "science of taking decision" and guided on how to interpret natural phenomena as good or bad.

The root word of "Istikh'arah" in Arabi is "Khair" (Khey, Ye, Ray). In the Arabic language, Khair can be explained by all that which is good. Istikh'arah means to ask Allah to guide one to the right action concerning any matter.

So al Istikh'arah is the noun for request or action while word of Istikh'arah explains a manner through which person seeks guidance from his Lord. Istikh'arah is used to determine whether it is convenient to do a thing or not. An individual, who is confused and is anxious about some matter of family, business or health, can approach (if not able to do himself) some Muttaqi to perform Istikh'arah. It is not some method of questioning Allah, rather it is for something one is confused about, or if one simply wants to take the best route.

Istikh'arah is done when one is confused in any matter or taking decision is difficult. This method was taught by Rasulullah(S) and his Ahl al Bait (AS). Tradition of Salaat al Khirat is popular

amongst the Shia Ismaili Musta'alavis, which is attributed to Amir al Mumineen Ali ibn Abi Talib(AS). He says: [1]

1). When you face confusion in any matter, do Istikh'arah and write on three Qura (small pieces of paper) as follows:

i). "Bismillahir Rahmanir Raheem Khiratun Minal'lahil Azizil Hakeem (name of the person who is offering the Salaat with his father's name) Af'alu Kaza wa Kaza

Name of the person for whom guidance is required with his father's name (can be your own) and write 'I should go forward with the plan'.

Then write on three small papers as follow:

ii). "Bismillahir Rahmanir Raheem Khiratun Minallahil Azizil Hakeem Ley Fulaan bin Fulaan La Yufalu Kaza wa Kaza

Name of the person for whom guidance is required with his father's name (can be your own) and write 'I should not proceed'.

Fold all six papers like an amulet under the Musalla and then offer two Rakaat Salaat. Hadith has come to us from a Sahabi, Jabir bin Abdullah(R.A). He said that Rasulullah (S) instructed: [2] "When anyone of you intends taking decision, he must perform two Rak'aat Salaat with the Niyah of Istikh'arah".

Do Wadu then take Niyat of Salaat al Istikh'arah which is as follow: [3]

Usalli Salaatal Khirate Rakatayne Lil'lahe Azzawajalla Ada'an Mustaqbilal Kabatil Haraame Allahhu Akbar.

Then offer two Rakaat Salaat as follow: [4]

In first Rakaat Surah al Hamd and Surah al Ikhlas

In second Rakaat Surah al Hamd and Surah al Qadr.

After Salaam recite 100 times in Sajud:

Astakhiru'laha Be Rehmatehe Khiratan Fee Afiyatin

Raise head from Sajud and recite:

Allah'humma Khirlee Fee Jameeay Umuree Fee Sirrin Minka wa Aafiyyatin

Then recite Dua of Istikh'arah available in "Al Sahifah al Kamilah"[5] of Al Imam Ali Zain ul Abideen(AS):

"Allahumma Inni Astakheruka Bey'ilmeka Fa'salley Ala Mohammaddin wa'alelehi waqzilee Bil Khairate wal'Himna Marefatal ikhtiyaare ..."

(O Allah! I consult you on behalf of good of your Knowledge. Therefore, send Salawaat upon Mohammad and his descendents; decree for me which is Khair - good. Inspire us with Marefat (of choice) to select the best and make that a source of Riza(substance), to being pleased with what You have decreed for us and submitting to what You have decided"....).

It is a long Dua which explains the concept of Istikh'arah in length to the seekers of learning. It is recommended to recite this Dua before going to sleep at night and begging Allah to direct him by a dream or insight, or by an inspiration in any manner which may help him to take a decision.

This should be recited 101 times precisely: [6]

"Asta'khairu Billahe".

Afterward mix six folded pieces of papers. Take each paper after recitation of Bismillah. In this manner you should take only five papers. If you find three papers equal then do act accordingly. Don't see number six.

2). Before retiring at night, [7] this is practiced by pious and righteous people from centuries. It is not necessary that after performing Dua and Amal of Istikh'arah everyone sees anything in a dream that indicates what should be done. If this happens, it is not recommended to repeat the Istikh'arah. When you perform this Amal appealing to Allah for Hidayah (guidance), you should be certain that Allah will choose the best option for you. You entrust your problem to Him and He will help you.

For Istikh'arah Recite: [8]

"Inni sa Afalo be Hadha" - I plan to go ahead with this"

Or

"Inni La Afalo be Hadha" - I do not wish to go ahead with this".

Then depending on the guidance signs, you choose to either do it or don't. When you are doing it through the Qur'an, you can get a more detailed reply. In this case, don't do it yourself, you will probably end up pulling your hair trying to decipher the meaning of the Ayah; consult an Aalim to do it for you. The Aalim will be able to explain the relevant part of Ayah very well. Remember if you go ahead with it, you have to stick to the outcome.

3). The following method of Istikh'arah is taught by Abi Abdillah al Imam Jafar al Sadiq bin al Imam Muhammad al Baqir(A.S). After completion of any Farz Salaat, face the Qiblah and recite:[9]

i). Surah al Fatiha Once

ii). Surah al Ikhlas thrice

iii). Salawaat 15 times

iv). Then recite the following Dua:[10]

"Allahumma Inni Asaluka Behaqil Husaine Wa Jaddehi Wa Abihey Wa Ummehe Wa Akhiye Wal Aimate Min Zurriyyattehe An Tusalliya Alaa Muhammadin Wa Aali Muhammadin Wa Ann Tajala Liyal Khiyaraata Fee Hazehis Sabhati Wa An Turyanee Maa Huwal Aslahu Lee Fee Deeni Wa Dunyaya Allahumma In Kana Aslah u Fee Deeni Wa Dunyaaya Fee Ala Maa Anna Aazimun Alayhi Faamurnee Wa illa Fanhanee Innaka Alaa Kulli Shayin Qadeer" .

(v) Hold your Rosary or Tasbeeh in your left hand at any place and start moving one bead at a time with your right hand and recite: [11]

The Tasbeeh Fatimah has immense significance as informed by Aimmah Ahl al Bait and their Duat had discussed its Haqaiq. Imam Baqir (A.S) says:[12]

"Reciting Tasbih Fatimah (A.S) every day after every Salaat is liked by me more than reciting one thousand Rakaat of (Mustahab) Salaat".

In a tradition Imam Muhammad al Baqir (A.S) says: [13]

"One who recites the Tasbih Fatimah and then seeks Taubah(forgiveness), will be forgiven".

Imam Mohammad al Baqir(A.S) says:[14]"(Reciting Tasbih) drives away Shait'an and makes results in the satisfaction of Allah".

Reciting Tasbih regularly relieves the person from adversities of Dunya as well as the Akhirah. Therefore one should not ignore its Barakaat and Hasanaat and should not be careless and lazy in its recitation. In this connection, Imam Jafar al Sadiq (A.S) said to one of his Ashaab: [15]

“You do adhere to it and be regular about its recitation; for sure one who is steadfast upon its recitation will not encounter adversity.”

Tasbeeh Fatimah: [16]

i). Allahu Akbar 33 times

ii). Alhamdulillah 33 times

iii). Subhanallah - 33 times

iv). La’ ilaha illallah 1 time

If the last bead ends with Subhan Allah, it means neither good nor bad.

If it ends with Al Hamdulillah it means good.

And if it ends with La ‘ilaha ‘illallah it means do not do it.

If you have received an answer as explained below, stop doing istikh’arah. Do not repeat Isitkharah for 7 days. It is better that right after reciting the Dua , given above, sleep with Wadu (people who cannot keep the Wadu for longer times due to health problems do not have to worry about it before falling asleep) and face the direction of the Qiblah, (not necessary but it is Sunnah of our beloved Nabi) .

Istikh’arah as per guidance of Rasulullah(S) and Ahl al Bait (A.S)is not meant for each and everything in life; it should be practiced only when a situation occurs which is beyond human control. Amir al Mumineen Ali (A.S) says: [17]

When you intend to do something important, seek guidance of Allah and do not decide on your own. How many people have acted upon their self-judgment and have met failure or destruction.

Allah is the Knower of Ghaib (unseen) and He guides His creation for the betterment: [18]

“He Alone has the keys of the Ghaib(unseen), of which no one knows except Him. He knows whatever is in the land and in the sea; there is not a single leaf that falls without His knowledge, there is neither a grain in the darkness of the earth nor anything fresh or dry which has not been recorded in a Clear Book”.

Ahadith are the foundation of this Tradition. Abi Jafar al Imam Muhammad al Baqir (A.S) says: [19]

"We (the Ahl al Bait) teach the method of Istikh’arah (asking Allah for what is best) just as we teach the Surahs of the Qur’an”.

People consider indication through this tradition as a sacred signal; if a sign is not in favor then precautionary measures should be taken as a safeguard. If the outcome of the Istikh’arah is against what a person hoped and still makes his own decision to adopt his own path, then he, tempted by his lust for material gains will be responsible for his own loss. This method greatly helps a person who approaches a wise Muttaqi person to seek his expert advice, as per the direction of Istikh’arah. However, all people are not equal in intellect and Taqwa or able to extend advice as per the need. Capability in providing advice is of great help if one follows the direction of Istikh’arah. Qur’an is the Afzal source of Istikh’arah.

Tradition of Fa’al:

A "Fa'al" is performed to ascertain some action, in which a situation seems cloudy. The root word of Fa'al in Arabi is Fey, Alif, Hamzah, Laam. Fa'al with the Qur'an is almost near to Istikh'arah but goes a step further. It determines not only whether it is expedient to do a thing, but it reveals the whole character and progress of the proposed undertaking. A careful research shows that its significance is acknowledged by divine personalities and Muslims follow this practice around the world. An Aalim opens the Qur'an in the same way when he does Istikh'arah but instead of reading the first words or Ayah on the first page, he turns six pages and on the seventh page looks at the sixth line and acts as per the indication of the Ayah. Unless a person is not well versed with the meaning of the Qur'an, he will not be able to understand the sense of the Ayah. If an Ayah portrays something good, it means that the beginning of the undertaking will be auspicious. He then turns to the end of the passage to learn what the final outcome will be and reads where he first opened to ascertain the character of the matter while in progress. The meanings are usually unclear to be interpreted to fit any and every situation.

Its help is taken some times on the occasion of marriage although its application and use isn't restricted to just matrimonial issues. For the purpose of marriage, it is often used to work out the suitability of a prospective spouse and on the character of his/her immediate family members. Help of Fa'al is usually taken when people are confused and need some divine indication. The clergy who demands fees/gifts is not right and should be stayed away from. Only a Fa'al of a pious person is acceptable who refuses to take its service charges and is not greedy. It is absolutely wrong to determine ones affairs through Fa'al other than the Qur'an. Due to ignorance of Talim of Islam people even believe and follow method of opening Fa'al by a parrot which picks one envelope out of many envelopes. The people who open such kinds of Fa'al and the people who solicit their matters from such frauds are sinners.

Method of Fa'al:

Sirah Literature guides in the etiquettes of taking Fa'al. Whenever you want to seek the best from the Qur'an, do as follows: [20]

- i). Do Wadu and take the Qur'an in your hands.
- ii). Sit on Musalla.
- iii). If the time is in between morning till 10 am then use Qur'an Surah 1 till Surah 10.
- iv). If the time is between 10 AM till 2 PM, then open Qur'an Surah 11 till Surah 20.
- v). If you will do it between 2 PM till sunset, you will use Surah 21 till 30.
- vi). If it is night then use the whole Qur'an.

These are the times when the Fa'al should be taken. Then recite as follow: [21]

- 1). Salawaat 11 times
- 2). Surah al Fatiha 1 time
- 3). Ayat ul Kursi 1 time
- 4). Surah al Ikhlas 3 times
- 5). Salawaat 11 times

Then recite Dua as follow:

"Allah'humma Inni Tawakkaltu Alyka wa Taf'altu Beykitabeka Fa'areni Ma Huwal Maktuba Fee Sirrikal Maknune Be Ghaibeka Allahumma Bayyen Lee Ma Huwa Minal Khaire wal Sharre was Saade wan Nahse wal Nafe wal Nuqse Antal Haqqu wa Kitabekal Haq wa Amrekal Haq wa

mashyatekal Haq wa Qazaikal Haq Fanzil Alaynal Haq Be Haqqe Muhammadin wa Aalehit Tayyebeen al Tahereen Salawatullahe Alayhim Ajmayeen”

(O Allah! I am seeking the best from your Book and I am relying upon You so show me from Your Book what is written from Your secrets and inform from Your unseen Knowledge.

Open the Qur’an and read the Ayah from the right side of the page. Count 7 pages forward from there, not backwards. Your answer is on the seventh page, on the 7th, 8th or 9th line depending on the length of the Ayah. A page means a leaf. For example when you open the Qur’an you see page 1 and page 2 but your answer will be on page 7. Sometimes to understand translation is very difficult. The words often will not convey a direct answer but are taken as affirmative or negative accordingly, as their general meaning may be good or bad, promising a blessing, or denouncing a threat.

It is important to note that the practice of Fa’al is different from fortune telling activities which is Har’am. Many people make it their business and people weak in Aqidah visit them frequently to get solution of their problems. The trick of the trade of all the practitioners is to tell their client that he is in dire circumstances and only they can save him. The usual questions asked are about one’s personality, travel, marriage, love affairs, financial success or business well being, one at a time. The less usual ones are about success in examinations, health, etc. Only one question can be asked with one Fa’al. For another question please repeat the whole procedure of Dua again. It is Har’am to use Qur’an for future prediction.

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- 2).”Saheeh al Bukhari”, Hadith 263, transmitted by Jabir bin Abdullah*
- 3). Taharat and Niyyah is a very important component which Awliya teach for Amal*
- 4).Imam al Sadiq (AS) taught, ‘If any of you wish to do something, then offer two Rakaat Salaat al Istikharah, before Istikharah’.*
- 5). “Al Sahifah al Kamilah al Sajjadiyyah”, p.318, Pub. Tehran, Iran*
- 6).ilm ul Adaad (singular: Adad) play vital role in Uloom Khafiyyah and through the help of Adaad which signifies particular power we can get the required result*
- 7). “Qaratis Yemeniyyah”, Fee Zikar Fath al Abwaab, manuscript written during the era of 36th Ismaili Mustaalavi Dawoodi Dai, Sayedna Musa Kalimuddin, 1120 (A.H), Jamnagar, India*
- 8). (Majmuah, written by Sayedi Abdulali Khanji al Qamari, I have found this manuscript in the custody of his descendent, Shaikh Abde Aali al Qamari, Karachi)*
- 9). “Qaratis Yemeniyyah”, Fee Zikar Fath al Abwaab, manuscript written during the era of 36th Ismaili Mustaalavi Dawoodi Dai, Sayedna Musa Kalimuddin, 1120 (A.H), Jamnagar, India*
- 10). ibid*

- 11) *This method is common among Shias, Sunnis and Sufiyas.*
- 12). *Al-Kafi, Kitabus Salaat*
- 13). *Wasail al Shia, vol. 4, P. 1023*
- 14). *Wasail al Shiah, vol. 4, P. 1023*
- 15). *Al-Kafi, Kitabus Salaat, P. 343*
- 16). *This is the correct formation of Tasbeeh Fatimah. Any difference in recitation would disturb the required result.*
- 17). *Ghurur al Hikm, No 20, p. 196*
- 18). *Surah al An'am - 6: Ayah 59*
- 19). *“Wasail ash Shia”, vol.7, P.66, Hadith 10101*
- 20). *“Al Sahifah al Yemeniyyah”, manuscript written in the year 935(AH), during the era of 23rd Ismaili Musta'alavi Dai Sayedna Muhammed Ezzuddin, Zabeed, Yemen*
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